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The Washington Historical Quarterly

MARKING THE WASHINGTON-IDAHO BOUNDARY.

Until 1863 the State of Idaho formed a portion of what was then known as Oregon. During that year the Territory of Idaho was organized by act of Congress by segregating a portion of the territories of Washington, Nevada, Nebraska and the State of Oregon. The following year the new Territory of Idaho lost a portion of its original area to form the new Territory of Montana. The boundaries of Idaho as organized were partly natural; that is, formed by rivers or mountain chains, and partly artificial, or parallels of latitude or meridians of longitude. The latter never having been indicated by markings on the earth's surface, controversies frequently arose as to the jurisdiction of the courts in the various territories contiguous to Idaho. For the purposes of taxation and the settlement of disputed matters before the courts, it became important that a demarkation of Idaho's artificial boundaries should be made. Accordingly, in 1873, Congress made an appropriation of \$10,800 to establish the western boundary of Idaho, or that portion lying east of the Territory of Washington not already established by nature. The Secretary of the Interior was directed to definitely mark on the earth's surface by conspicuous monuments accurately, established, this portion of Idaho's boundary. To execute this work, the then Secretary of the Interior, Columbus Delano, appointed the writer, then a resident of Olympia, Washington Territory. I was instructed to begin at the intersection of the Snake and Clearwater Rivers, as said intersection existed at the time of the organic act in 1863, and to mark a line on the earth's surface from that initial point running due north to the forty-ninth parallel of north latitude, this being the boundary between British possessions and the United States; to establish an iron monument at the initial point, and, at the end of every mile, a post

seven feet long, and six inches square, imbedded in the earth three feet, with a mound three feet high at the base of the post, and two pits, two feet long, one foot wide and two feet deep, one on the east and one on the west side of each post. The posts were to be marked by cutting into the post not less than one quarter of an inch deep, as follows: on the east side, the word "Idaho," on the west side "Washington," on the north "1873," and on the south, the distance in miles from the initial point. I was instructed to measure the distance twice by chaining and to verify the measurements by astronomical observations, determining the latitude within three seconds of arc for each parallel of latitude at the even degrees; also, to make observations on Polaris when it crossed the meridian or at its eastern or western elongation, every clear night, to correct the alignment.

The party organized to perform this work proceeded to Lewiston, Idaho, during the summer of 1873. It consisted, besides myself as officer in charge, of an astronomer, two transit men, a leveler, for chainmen, four moundbuilders and axemen, two cooks and three packers. One of the most difficult problems in the execution of this survey was the termination of the junction of two rivers, as said junction existed ten years prior to the location of the survey. The Snake River is a rapid stream, flowing about ten miles per hour through alluvial soil with shifting channels and changing shores. The Clearwater is a smaller stream, with similar banks and bed, and they formed a junction just below the peninsula upon which the town of Lewiston, Idaho, is built. The party spent nearly two weeks in the vicinity of Lewiston determining this initial point. Once decided upon, it was impracticable to plant a visible iron monument at the junction of the two rivers, so the monument was erected on the north bank of the Snake and Clearwater Rivers above high-water mark and has remained a permanent landmark from that day to this. The survey was made with much care and deliberation, the chaining being verified by the astronomical tests, and wherever a discrepancy was found, either in measurements or in alignment, the line was re-established repeatedly until a satisfactory result was obtained. At that date the country was sparsely settled, only a few frontiersmen having taken up claims near the Washington-Idaho boundary, between Lewiston and the British boundary. No white man not a member of the surveying party, except two trappers, was seen after leaving Cowley's Bridge on the Spokane River until its return from the completion of the survey. In crossing the Pend Oreille River there was a delay of three days

in making rafts upon which the instruments, provisions and camp equipage were crossed. There were forty-five horses used in transportation. Of this number thirty were pack horses and the balance saddle horses. These animals were driven into the river and crossed by swimming, the men crossing on the rafts. Where the line intersects the Pend Oreille River it crosses two islands. Upon one of these islands were two trappers who were astonished at the appearance of the surveyors, and the surprise was reciprocal, much information being obtained from both parties as to the character of the surrounding country, its water, timber and grazing facilities being inquired into by the surveying party.

When within about fifteen miles of the end of the line, the country from the Spokane River north having been heavily timbered, mountainous and rocky and progress with the work slow and laborious, it was found that the provisions had all been consumed except several sacks of flour. This flour was divided into equal parts and given pro rata to the members of the party. On the summit of Old Baldy Mountain, fifteen miles south of the terminal point, all of the live stock, the packers and the cooks were left in camp and the others took their blankets on their backs and their ration of flour and started to complete the last fifteen miles of the boundary line. It required five days to blaze and mark this line through the heavy timber. When the forty-ninth parallel was reached by chaining, and the test made by latitude observations confirming the correctness of the chaining, it was confidently expected that a well-defined boundary between British Columbia and the United States would be intersected at this point. The instructions from the Washington authorities stated that said international boundary had been carefully established by a joint commission of British and American engineers, that the timber had been razed to the earth's surface and that a strip of open country, sixty feet wide, would be found marking the forty-ninth parallel. The party was greatly surprised, embarrassed and puzzled to find no indications whatever of any white man having ever been in the vicinity of this parallel.

After spending two days in a vain search for some evidence of the international boundary the party made its permanent location of the forty-ninth parallel and started on its weary return to Old Baldy Mountain. Their flour was now exhausted and they returned in an almost famished condition. Fortunately the packers and cooks had killed a moose in the absence of the field party and some dried peas were found from which coffee was made and some dried salmon was obtained from the Indians,

and upon this diet the party managed to get back to Cowley's Bridge where a supply of provisions was bought and the party continued its homeward march, disbanding at Lewiston, Idaho, in the winter of '73 and '74.

I returned directly to Olympia by way of Walla Walla and Portland and made a brief report to the Secretary of the Interior of the progress of the work, stating the conditions found at the terminal point, where no evidences of an international boundary could be found, and asked for further instructions. In those days it required two weeks for a letter to reach Washington, D. C., from Olympia. In about six weeks I received a letter from the Department advising me that a search of the report of the international boundary survey on file in the State Department disclosed the fact that for a distance of about twenty miles east and thirty miles west of the point where the Washington-Idaho boundary terminated the international line had not been established because of the extreme roughness of the topography and the belief among the engineers of the two governments that the land was too worthless to ever be settled by white men. The Commission had omitted to establish this part of the line and resumed their work at a point some twenty miles east and running thence along the forty-ninth parallel to the Lake of the Woods. The receipt of the information that the international boundary line had not been established where it should be intersected by the Washington-Idaho boundary was a great relief of the suspense which I had suffered because of the positive instructions to close my line upon the well-marked international boundary supposed to have been established with great care by engineers of national fame. I immediately began the preparation of an elaborate report from the data obtained in the field and consumed the remainder of the winter in completing the report, maps and other details required by my instructions. A report of the survey is given briefly in the annual report of the Secretary of the Interior for the year 1874.

While there has been some discussion among the residents and particularly in newspapers of the two Territories contiguous to this boundary, as to the correctness of its location, and various schemes have been proposed by which the line might be moved farther east or farther west, no evidence as to its incorrect establishment has been submitted to the Department of sufficient value to cause a re-survey. The old line is now being remarked by more permanent monuments and the demarkation as established in 1873 will probably never be changed. Some fifteen or twenty

years ago a bill was passed by Congress providing for the annexation of the four northern counties of Idaho to Washington, but President Cleveland withheld his signature and the measure failed. For the first ninety miles the boundary runs through an agricultural region, a portion of which, the so-called Palouse Country, is the richest farming section of the State of Washington. The last fifty miles, or from the Spokane River north to the terminus, the boundary runs through an extremely rough country, being heavily timbered, mountainous, rocky and covered with down timber and heavy underbrush.

In the personnel of the party were several men who have since become well known and prominent in their respective localities. Hon. E. L. Smith, of Hood River, Oregon, has been Speaker of the Oregon Legislature and has been frequently mentioned as a candidate for Governor of Oregon. The late W. Byron Daniels was for several terms Mayor of Vancouver, Washington, and a member of the State Legislature, as well as a leading attorney in his home town. A. Reeves Ayres has been Clerk or Deputy Clerk of the United States Court for a quarter of a century. Mr. Dysart, of Ellensburg, is a prominent farmer in his own section. These were all members of the surveying party. The astronomer, Denison, has been a professor in the Engineering Department of the University of Michigan continuously for nearly forty years. The man originally engaged for that work was Dr. Mark W. Harrington, late president of the University of Washington and a classmate of mine, but after engaging for this work he was offered a more tempting field by Professor Dall in his survey of the Aleutian Islands, and I obtained the services of Professor Denison as his substitute in the Washington-Idaho boundary work.

ROLLIN J. REEVES.